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A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED  
EBENEZER RADCLIFFE  
JANUARY the 1st. 1761.

For the Benefit of the  
FREE-SCHOOL in *Gravel-Lane.*



1846

ST. JOHN'S

1850

THE CHURCH

ST. JOHN'S

The charitable Man the best Œconomist, Patriot, and Christian.

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A  
S E R M O N  
PREACHED AT  
St. THOMAS's, Southwark,  
O N  
JANUARY the 1st. 1761.  
For the Benefit of the  
FREE-SCHOOL in *Gravel-Lane.*

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By E. RADCLIFF.

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Published at the Request of the Managers.

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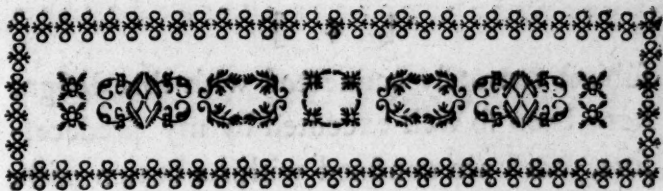
ST THOMAS'S

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M A T. XXV. 40.

*In as much as ye have done it to the  
least of these, my brethren, ye  
have done it unto me.*

**S**T A N D here your humble petitioner, in favour of a very useful and important charity ; and I will not despair of success, when I have so many agreeable objects to recommend my request \*. With them I would have left their own cause, as sufficient to plead it, and directed you to other considerations, without attempting to awaken in you new sentiments of compassion. But the invaluable blessings of religious knowledge, † the lasting influence of a virtuous education, and the best methods of conducting it ; the beauty and happiness of early piety, and every other

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\* Above 200 children are educated.

† Mr. Kippis.

subject remotely connected with this design, have been so well executed by my predecessors, that I am confined within a beaten path, and have nothing to add but a few reflections upon charity in general, and that species of it now under consideration. Yet, whom shall I solicit? The patrons and conductors of this institution? — Your generosity has prevented any such applications as these. I have only to thank you in the name of God, and these children, for your past favours; to implore their continuance; and to refer you, for your recompence, to the resurrection of the just. But you, who contribute only occasionally to the necessities of the poor, who are *cold* to charity from the frequent prostitution of it, yet want neither affluence of fortune, nor liberality of heart; you whom chance, or custom, or curiosity, has led within these doors, I beseech you to attend to a few artless representations, and consider how intimately your present bounty, and your future acceptance, are connected.

With respect to the excellence of charity in general, how beautifully is it described and celebrated by the eloquent Apostle of the Gentiles: “ Though I could speak with the  
“ tongue

“tongue of men and angels, and have not  
 “charity, I am become as a sounding brass,  
 “and a tinkling cymbal. Charity never faileth,  
 “but whether there be prophecies they shall  
 “fail, whether there be tongues they shall  
 “cease, whether there be knowledge it shall  
 “vanish away.” — It stamps upon man the  
 nearest likeness to the God of all perfection,  
 to resemble whom is his highest glory and  
 happiness.

It flows from the constitution of human  
 nature, and the exercise of it is the best se-  
 curity for the order and happiness of society,  
 which the rigorous spirit of justice would  
 destroy. It has the best tendency to form and  
 prepare the mind, by benevolent habits for  
 the pleasure of immortality. It draws down  
 the blessing of God upon our temporal con-  
 cerns, and teaches us the best use of the  
 mercies of Providence, not by wasting or  
 idolizing them, but by “Lending them to the  
 “Lord,” upon the immutable security of  
 reason and revelation. Finally, it lays a  
 good foundation against the time to come,  
 and promises us the notice of Jesus at the  
 last day, when he will esteem whatever has  
 been done to the meanest of his followers as  
 done

done unto him. — Amidst such a concourse of testimonies and promises, where shall we fix our attention.

1. The world is constituted so as to require the mutual intercourses of charity for its subsistence, and the stations and characters of human life are admirably diversified to promote and encourage it.

The poor make a large part of mankind, and are a very numerous family not likely to become extinct. But that they may not be despised, God has made them necessary to the community, by assigning to them those laborious, but useful offices, which are a source of unspeakable advantages to the rest.

Even in this land of liberty where universal plenty may be most justly expected, where there are such strong motives to industry, and so many opportunities of acquiring an honest maintenance, the numbers of poor are a reflection upon our pride, and mock the magnificence of our riches.

Now at first view it looks like a censure upon Providence, to think there should be such strange inequality in the fortunes and conditions of mankind. To think — that  
while



while the lot of some is cast in pleasant places, others are plunged into the depths of misery : while some are attiring themselves with the richest ornaments, others are shivering with nakedness and cold : while some are regaling themselves with the banquet of a bountiful table, others are eating their scanty bread in bitterness of spirit.

But this distribution of things which startles the sceptick, seems to the wise man just and good. This miscellany of life apparently so destitute of proportion and design is the effect of consummate skill and contrivance : for it answers best to the idea of a state of probation, which ought to be fitted to improve man in religion and virtue, and more particularly in benevolence and charity, as most essential to the perfection of his nature. Was this life a state of full retribution : were mens circumstances the test of their characters : if our happiness absolutely depended upon the good things we possess : if the honours of a future life were dispensed with the same partiality as the present : then I would not attempt to vindicate the ways of God to men. I would submit in silence to those judgments which I could not understand, and dare

dare not condemn. But since riches are not the reward of virtue, nor poverty the punishment of sin, since the temper of the heart determines our happiness and our desert : since the gates of immortality yield admittance to all, without respect of persons, we may justify the goodness of heaven, and conclude, that the difference of rank and station was only intended to make us dependant on each other, to unite us together from a sense of mutual convenience, to inspire confidence, love, pity, and all the social dispositions of companions embarked in the same cause, and endeared by one common interest. The rich are moved with compassion while they are relieving distress, and the poor are melted into gratitude, while they are supplied with good. This is the means of diffusing a more generous spirit through all relations than could possibly prevail, if they were independant of each other ; nay, it is far better than if they were all upon a level, for it gives birth to the exercise of those god-like sentiments, which otherwise, would never have existed among us.

Thus has God united the children of men in the closest ties as one family and fraternity,

ty, and nothing could be more excellently devised to promote friendship and respect, gratitude and benevolence, and all the virtues of rational creatures. In fine, this scene of vicissitude and variety, this mixture of good and evil, fulness and want, wealth and poverty, reminds us of the climate of our country, which though never long constant and serene, gives a thousand advantages to its inhabitants, and is happily situated betwixt the extreams of deadly heat, and intolerable cold. Here let us adore the dispositions of infinite wisdom, who has made the same world the theatre of his judgments and his mercies, the same events, instruments to punish, and improve us; who has caused our very differences to attract us more strongly to each other, and ordered the inequalities of this life, to conduce to the perfection of a better.

The second recommendation of charity is, that it brings us the nearest to the sublime character of the God of all perfection, a motive which wants nothing to endear it to every reasonable creature, for when can we be so happy, or so exalted in our own estimation, as when we approach as far as human infir-

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mity will permit to any degree of resemblance to the parent of mercy and truth.

This is the grand standard of excellence and purity to those who are formed in the divine image, and to which we ought to be daily aspiring.

What is the idea by which the Almighty is pleased to represent himself to his creatures? Not in the robes of vengeance, not in the colours of a tyrant, not in the pomp of majesty, nor the awfulness of justice, but in the benignity of compassion; he delights in the appellation of the God of love, he maintains the amiable and honourable character of the guardian, the benefactor, the friend of man, the only character which can produce sincere generous faith, and lay the foundation of acceptable obedience. Would you then imitate him, let your chearful countenance shine like his sun, let your charitable blessings like his showers descend upon the orphan and the poor, and to animate us to such an imitation, I would ask what qualities are there beside in which we can boast of any similitude to his correspondent perfections? What is our power to omnipotence? — Infirmary and frailty. What is  
our



our knowledge to infinite wisdom? — Ignorance and darkness. What is our space and duration to his omnipresence and eternity? — a span, a moment. No, it is here only he gives us leave to make advances towards his blessed nature, and while he has confined all his other attributes to himself as his incommunicable privileges, he has permitted us to enjoy the inexpressible pleasure of copying his benevolence, and to encourage us to do so, he has given us a greater abundance than our own wants require, and has supplied us with an overflowing store to dispence by his commission and authority to our fellow creatures in distress.

Consider well and employ faithfully this distinguished privilege, ye who have every thing richly to enjoy. Remember that to you he consigns the important charge of distributing his bounties, vindicating his providence, and clearing his conduct from the suspicion of partiality: he has appointed you guardians not to waste his favours, but to spread them all abroad. The honour, the character of the great Lord of all things is in your hands, and on your fidelity it depends, whether the sons and daughters of

distress shall bless or reproach the author of their being. When they petition his throne for their daily bread, shall **he** reverse the established laws of nature to supply them? No, he has given a portion sufficiently for all, if it be justly divided; he refers them to you; and if you shut your ears against their cry, he will resent the broken trust with dreadful severity. "Vengeance is mine, I will recompence the wrongs of my children," saith the Lord of Hosts.

The third argument in behalf of charity is, that it promotes and confirms habits of benevolence and love, those inexhaustible sources of genuine satisfaction and endless pleasure.

By relieving the necessities of the indigent, we shall consider ourselves as having some relation to them; by pitying them we shall cultivate respect and humanity, and so conquer that pride which was never made for man; by readily parting with our substance, we shall be secure against that mean and sordid vice of loving wealth for its own sake. And after all, this is the sole advantage which affluence can boast, notwithstanding the many beauties and pleasures we connect with it in our deluded imaginations. Consider

sider the rich man separate from this privilege, and where is his glory? Is it desirable to be encircled by every alluring object that may pall the appetite, enflame ambition, and hurry them by indulgences to an untimely end? Is it any benefit to be incapable of exercising the common powers of nature, to be exempted from any fatigue and distress, to slumber in indolence, to entertain no cares, to endure no labour, to taste none of the luxury of repose. — Painful and insipid pre-eminence! — No: was it not for charity, you would be of all men the most miserable. Instead of envying we should pity your greatness, and far from regretting your honours, we should lament your condition in receiving nothing but hypocritical worship, hearing no truth, and enjoying no friend. Life is too valuable a blessing, to sacrifice to idle state and noise, too serious to be dreamed away in vanity and folly, or murdered betwixt the midnight revel, and the noon-day slumber. Exclude you from the god-like office of spreading happiness round you, and we should rejoice in our humbler lot, eat our bread with contentment, and bless God for delivering us  
 from

from your anxiety and temptations. — But by the means of your fortune, you can accomplish those happy ends which we can only wish for, you can add to the felicity of the world, engage the prayers and gratitude of the fatherless, wipe away the tears of the disconsolate parent, and sooth the innumerable misfortunes of human life. Thus you may become the benefactors of society upon earth, and shine like the stars of the firmament in heaven.

But the most interesting motive to charity which I have reserved for the last, is contained in my text, “ Inasmuch as ye have “ done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

We cannot entertain a nobler idea of the excellence and dignity of our holy religion, than when we see it enforcing by its own divine sanction, the eternal laws of humanity, and joining the duties of piety and mercy in everlasting *friendship*. Be not forgetful, says the apostle, to be hospitable to strangers, for by so doing, some have entertained angels unawares. But it seems from these words, that befriending the poor and needy, is taking into our protection, and embracing in  
our



our arms the Son of God, "Done unto thee!" — Immortal Redeemer! When did we see thee naked and clothed thee, sick and visited thee, destitute and took thee in? For what have we deserved such acknowledgments as these? What an uncommon and striking motive to charity is this? Did you imagine you had for ever parted with your substance, that being bestowed upon such helpless objects, it was absolutely lost without the least possibility of recompence? Was your generosity free from the most distant views of future interest? Happy disappointment! Cast your eyes to the last day of account, and behold it all returning into your bosom with infinite increase. Observe the seeds of generosity which seemed to be destroyed, springing up into a glorious and plentiful harvest. See your favours all abundantly repaid, by the approbation of the judge of quick and dead.

If a cup of cold water given to a disciple, shall be well pleasing to him, how much more acceptable must it be to teach the mouths of infants to lisp the praises of their Redeemer, to instil into them senti-  
ments

ments of truth and justice, and direct them in the paths of wisdom and pleasantness.

Any ingenuous and sincere mind will be thankful amidst all its sentiments of love, faith, and resignation, that there is another way still of shewing its zeal and affection to the cause of Christ: what expressions of gratitude can we utter, equal to the value of that glory and immortality he has revealed? What recompence shall we make the author of our faith, for his ministry, death, and triumph, and all that he has done to procure the salvation of a degenerate world? That unspotted example, those tender promises, those inimitable laws of grace and truth, that noble fortitude, those transcendent merits overwhelm us with admiration. We see all the patriots and friends of mankind eclipsed by those superior services; and to compleat all, when we are justly confounded at the small acknowledgments we are capable of making, he condescends to look upon the tribute of common humanity, due to our fellow creatures, as an obligation which he will not forget. He makes our duty to each other the standard of our regard to him, and accepts it as the sincerest

sincerest proof of friendship and obedience.

It is now time for me to recommend that part of charity which falls under our present consideration. The origin and design of which in a few words was this.

In the threatening reign of the second James, a politick jesuit, full of the proselyting spirit of his religion, opened his mission in one of the poorest parts of this city. The first step he took, was the tempting proposal of a free education to all children without distinction, and under the colour of this generosity, he obtained what he wished, an opportunity of infecting the minds of youth with the principles of popery. In opposition to this well concerted project, three public spirited gentlemen † thinking no province too low, in which they might distinguish their zeal for truth and their country, erected a free-school without exception of persons, to train up children in protestant sentiments. This institution from small beginnings, has risen to its present flourishing state. Here the poor are taught the most useful branches of knowledge, and furnished

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with

† Mr. Arthur Shallet, Mr. Ferdinando Warner, Mr. Warburton.

with books and all other necessaries, without any expence to their parents. The charge of this has been defrayed by the annual contributions of the well-disposed, assisted by the occasional favours and donations of those, who may incline to support so excellent a design. And as the spirit of romanism is indefatigable in its attempts upon the common people, I have the pleasure of informing you, that the original design of this school is still faithfully attended to, and that the utmost care is taken to furnish the mind with antidotes, to the poison of that insinuating delusion. At the same time avoiding the spirit of bigotry, and regarding chiefly those doctrines, in which all protestants are agreed.

Before I urge you to patronize this scheme I will make a few observations upon the nature and tendency of it.

It is a pity the publick should receive so little benefit from the many noble structures, dedicated to the relief of misery in these realms; but the reason is, they were either built to gratify the vanity of the founder, or to answer some other idle purpose.

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The only satisfaction we can desire for our contributions, is to be assured of the goodness of the design proposed, and the faithful execution of it. As to the first, there cannot be a better end, than to reach out the means of knowledge and virtue to those, who by cruel circumstances, are deprived of them. And as to the second, it is committed to the management of those, whose characters render them incapable of violating any trust.

This charity is not intended to pamper a set of lazy devotees in luxury, under the pretence of devotion and abstinence from the world, it is not to maintain a race of ecclesiasticks in learned sloth, at the expence of the publick peace, it is not to train up orphans to genteel professions, but to furnish what the community wants, servants honest from principle, and diligent by habit; to save the offspring of the needy from ignorance, from temptation, from infamy, from a publick execution, and from eternal perdition. The method of effecting this, is by taking them at that early season of life, when they are most ductile, and initiating them in the first principles of religion

ligion and virtue. This is remedying the grand misfortunes of poverty, and putting it into their power to obtain the happiness of this life, and that which is to come.

The first stage of infancy in all mankind is the same, and no advantages distinguish the birth of the greatest persons. The poor naturally want neither powers of body nor mind, but being destitute of education and strangers to good examples, they know no law, and therefore fear no punishment; they are trained up to no duties, and therefore feel no restraint. Sloth grows up with them, and vice is their first acquaintance. They speak no language but oaths, and learn no accomplishments but to steal. — O Lord God! What enormous monsters do the children of men become, when their passions are let loose upon them; what venomous and deadly weeds spring up in the uncultivated mind! What a deluge of mischiefs flow from the neglect of a good, and the influence of a wicked education? From hence the retreats of shame are peopled, from hence the houses of drunkenness and mischief are recruited, here we may date the birth of lust, fraud, rapine, murder.

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This is the foundation of those iniquities, which our laws cannot restrain, and which justice is weary with punishing. Now it is not the purpose of this charity to complain of those evils, but to redress them ; not to apply feeble remedies, but to strike at the root of them, by extending the benefits of religious instruction to these regions of poverty and darkness. And what can promise better, than to instil the fear of God into them, which will make them tremble at injustice and a lie, to oblige them to frequent places of worship, where they will be struck with the most powerful of all virtuous motives, the belief of future happiness and misery. To inspire them with contentment, which will keep them from envying and coveting the stations of their superiors, or being indolent in their own ; to instruct them in the rudiments of christianity, which will make them diligent in business, serving the Lord ; to qualify them by useful accomplishments, for creditable occupations, and thus to give them an honest scorn of living by the humanity of passengers, and an aversion to the hidden works of darkness and dishonesty.

These

These are the solid excellencies of a school which I hope will never want friends, as long as truth and virtue are any thing more than names.

I beg pardon for being importunate, and I know it is cruelty to solicit a benevolent mind beyond its abilities. But when I see those who are already lost to this world, in danger of losing the next, and never likely to know the influence of that christianity, in the midst of which they are born, I must feel something for religion, as well as humanity, and I cannot help attempting to put you to some pain. I plead not for these, — I plead for Jesus in whom you believe, and who will do unto you, as you do unto them.

I urge you not for the sake of the unspeakable pleasure you will give to many a distressed parent, or the vast services you will do the publick, but for the genuine delight, the great, the manly reflections with which you will gratify your own hearts. Be charitable, — to yourselves. Adore the providence of God for an opportunity of spreading so much happiness, and purchasing so large a share of reputation and satisfaction,



faction, at the cheap price of your own superfluous abundance. All the elegancies of life, all the methods which luxury has invented, to squander an independent fortune, are mean and infamous when compared to this, nothing better than a prostitution of the gifts of heaven. Can we remember our common original, and ever forgive ourselves for suffering a pampered desire, a selfish passion, a piece of pride, to consume that portion, which would have saved a soul from death, and a reasonable creature from ruin? A reasonable creature I say, — for sure those are reasonable creatures amidst all their wretchedness; though destitute of hope, they have the marks of divine workmanship; though born to no inheritance, they have not lost the image of their God. It is not yet too late to rescue them from destruction, but too soon it may, — temptations are besetting them on all sides, infamy marks them for its own, lust is impatient to sacrifice them to its insatiable appetite, and a multitude of passions are impatient to seize upon the helpless victims: interpose thou good Samaritan, interpose, bind up their wounds,

wounds, carry them to an inn, and put them in the road to present and eternal happiness.

But perhaps it will be said, we are only training up members of a different communion, establishing the foundation of a party, and collecting out of the commonality, reinforcements to support a dying cause. And are these profelytes then to be envied? — But we disclaim all such sinister motives, we have not so learned Christ, we have no interests but those of human nature, we know no party but that of truth, and we want no followers but those of virtue; we are actuated by no bigotted selfish passions. No, — stand thou illustrious church, with length of days at thy right-hand, and at thy left-hand riches and honour; but while we dispute not thy precedence and dignity, we will contest with thee, the title of protestants and christians; we will vindicate our share in the pledges of our masters affection; and, relinquishing the lesser merits of opinion, strive for the noble prizes of integrity and benevolence.

Allow me, my friends, to solicit your generosity on this occasion, consider the lasting benefits of this charity. There is no bounds

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to its extent, no limits to its usefulness ; you give the children of the poor all the advantages of birth, without snatching them from their parents, or breaking the bonds of filial affection, the strongest, the most amiable, the most tender ; you convert the outcasts of society into ornaments ; you inspire those principles which may advance in endless progression, and be conveyed to their children and their children's children ; you may pursue in your own minds, the happy consequences through successive periods to future generations. It gathers in its course like a stream, and is continually increasing ; it will bear fruit when you are no more ; it will follow you to the grave, and be constantly adding to the recompence of your reward, till the resurrection of the just. O incomparable felicity ! God has dealt bountifully with you.

Ye who are masters of families, and have felt all the soft anxiety of parents, think on the agony those must sustain, who look upon themselves as the authors of all their children's misfortunes, only for having brought them into being. — Spare a small part of that substance, which you are lay-

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ing up with so frugal a hand, and think it no robbery of your posterity to alienate a little of their inheritance, to secure the prosperity of the rest.

Ye who have not entered into these endearing relations, imagine you see those distressed objects, imploring your pity in the eloquent language of infancy. Adopt them into your family, and by exercising a parental affection without its weakness, give them something better than life, — the means of making it comfortable and happy. Where can you better bestow the fruits of your labours, than by enriching the publick, and laying obligations on a whole community.

Ye who have made a considerable progress in life, and have met with a prosperous passage, remember those who are just setting out upon this dangerous journey, without friends, without fortune, without education; the world is all before them, but they have no place of rest in it; parents they have, but they can give them nothing but their tears; relations they have, but who knocks at the door of poverty? Who ever paid his court to misfortune, or claimed acquaintance with the fatherless?

Ye



Ye who never knew the miseries of life but in description, who are satiated with the good things of this world, and are ranging from object to object for some new entertainment, come, try if amidst all your pleasures you ever found one so transporting to the heart, so grateful to every sense, so delicious to the whole soul, as benevolence. There is not in nature a sound so sweet, as the voice of sorrow turned into gladness, nor a sight so noble, as a train of objects redeemed from misery and sin.

To whom shall I address myself beside ? The voice of nature directs me to you, ye delicate and charitable sex, as endued with the softest passions, and amiably turned to all the offices of tenderness.

Distress naturally flies to you for protection, and finds in your bosom a friend always warm, and when it is recommended by simplicity and youth, it can never fail of your pity. Remember, that compassion is the ornament of beauty, for it was the robe in which your Saviour was arrayed ; would you procure sincere applause, and inviolable esteem, let charity, goodness, and grace adorn all your actions.

To add only one motive more. It is wise and prudent to lay up something against the time to come. Remember the accidents of life, consider the misfortunes to which you are exposed, and provide against the vicissitude of all mortal things. You have entered upon another year, — perhaps, before you have made an estimate of the last ; you have counted your success, but not your loss ; you are flushed with hope, and impatient for new enterprizes and adventures ; and may no accident cross your honest purpose, may no calamity destroy your substance, may no disease smite your first-born ; but one event is inevitably certain, whether it will happen to-day or to-morrow, I know not : death will destroy your usefulness, and snatch from you the power of doing good. O save something from the common wreck, secure some consolation against the day of trouble. Let not your possessions utterly perish with you, but carry as much of them as you can into eternity. Consecrate a small remnant to virtue, before it take wings and fly away. Throw some tribute into the treasury of God. If you cannot spare a talent, give a mite : if  
you

you cannot root misery out of the world, at least do something, to stop its ravages among mankind. To conclude. Put on charity, and it shall fight for you, as with a strong arm, and a mighty spear; in the day of your affliction it shall be remembered. It shall stand by you on the bed of death, and administer comfort, when the companions of your pleasure and your prosperity are fled. When the profusions of the wicked shall rise up in judgment against them, your bounty shall be an evidence for you at the judgment-seat of Christ, and applaud you before angels and men. In a word, God do so to you, and infinitely more than you do to those children. Amen.



*T H E E N D.*

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